

Friday, September 16, 2011  
9:47 AM

[edited from: Report on Recent Research and a Prospectus for a Political Memoir, July 4, 1988]

On the night of President Kennedy's television announcement of the existence of Soviet missiles in Cuba, Monday, October 22, 1962, my friend Harry Rowen, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Plans and Policy, International Security Affairs, asked me to come to Washington to help out. I took the next plane from Los Angeles and spent several days of that week sleeping on a sofa in the Pentagon.

I worked on two of the three Working Groups that reported that week to the Executive Committee of the National Security Council (Excom), an ad hoc group that sat with the President and managed the Cuban Missile Crisis. One of these, chaired by Walt Rostow in the State Department, did "long range planning," looking two weeks ahead. The other, under Rowen in Defense, made plans for an air strike against the air defenses and missiles and an invasion of Cuba, scheduled tentatively for Monday or Tuesday, October 29 or 30.

On Saturday night, the 27th, Robert Kennedy delivered the President's ultimatum to Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin: if the missiles were not removed immediately they would be struck. He set (he later told me) a 48-hour deadline. He also warned that U.S. reconnaissance flights over Cuba would continue, and that if one more plane was shot down--as had happened that very morning--the U.S. would launch air strikes immediately. He rejected the Soviet proposal for ending the crisis, a public trade of the Soviet missiles in Cuba for removal of the comparable U.S. missiles in Turkey.<sup>1</sup>

President Kennedy was convinced that if he had to carry out this ultimatum, the Soviets would almost surely retaliate by attacking our missiles in Turkey. On Saturday afternoon, October 27, Rowen was asked by Secretary McNamara, for the Excom, to lay out alternative options for a U.S. response to a Soviet non-nuclear attack on the U.S. missiles assigned to NATO, in Turkey. Harry called me in to work on this, and the two of us sat at opposite sides of his desk, writing as fast as we could.

The first option we presented was "No further U.S. response": in effect calling it "even," missiles destroyed in Turkey for missiles destroyed in Cuba, seeking to end hostilities there. We took some pride, I recall, in beginning with that, since we felt that few advisors in that era would have had the nerve to include that as a policy option.

Other choices included non-nuclear reprisal on the Soviet base from which their attack had been launched; or on several more bases; with or without hitting Soviet air defense bases...

Despite the assignment, I believed it very unlikely that the Soviets would risk hitting our missiles in Turkey even if we did attack theirs in Cuba. Harry and I were even more

confident that the chance of nuclear war erupting from this confrontation was extremely low. We presumed that was also the attitude of the President and his lieutenants on the Excom.

We knew, of course, that a large part of the public, not only in the U.S. but throughout the world, thought otherwise. But the basic reason for our own confidence was our awareness of the overwhelming strategic nuclear superiority of the United States. And that, we knew, was not nearly so clear to the public.

After all, Kennedy had run for election in 1960 largely on the issue of a supposed "missile gap" favoring the Soviets. When he had discovered in office, in the fall of 1961, that the real missile (and bomber) gap was grossly in favor of the U.S., he did not make a dramatic effort to inform the public of just how wrong he had been. As a result, the public did not realize--indeed, the reality was still highly classified--how very little the Soviets actually had in the way of nuclear forces threatening the U.S.

In the fall of 1962 the U.S. had several hundred intercontinental, intermediate-range and sub-launched warheads and 3000 bombers within range of the Soviet Union. On the other side, the Soviets had at that time about 10 operational ICBM's within range of the United states (aside from the highly vulnerable missiles on Cuba, not yet operational) and about 190 intercontinental bombers.

Facing that near-monopoly of U.S. strategic nuclear power against the Soviet Union, it was inconceivable to us that Khrushchev would initiate nuclear operations under almost any circumstances. Indeed, I was confident, "Khrushchev had to back down."

In that belief I backed the blockade, and the implicit threat of an air strike, which seemed likely to me to cause the Soviets to withdraw. Indeed, I didn't think it would be necessary to carry out an air strike in order to get rid of the Soviet missiles in Cuba. Nor did I believe it would be necessary to trade away our missiles in Turkey, an option which, like the majority of the Excom, I strongly opposed for reasons of NATO solidarity.

However, if an air strike did take place and if the Soviets did, against all odds, recklessly confront us in Europe or at sea, one thing was unequivocally clear to Rowen and me: the U.S. should not initiate nuclear war under any circumstances, no matter what threats it might have made.

Based on a conversation I had had with Secretary McNamara in 1961--which I had been warned afterward to keep entirely to myself--I believed that he and the President shared this view (in contrast to their public, official statements). This was a key basis for my strong sense of personal loyalty to McNamara.

What this added up to was that the Soviets seemed to us likely to back down to U.S. firm non-nuclear threats, and even if they did not, there was almost no chance that either side would resort to nuclear weapons.

Thus our views in 1962--without defending them here--were at least consistent with our support of the fairly threatening posture and active "pressures" the Excom had chosen from the beginning. We assumed that the Excom members we were serving in a staff role thought much the same way. Indeed, my notes reveal that sometime during that week, Harry Rowen remarked to me, "I think the Executive Committee puts the chance of nuclear war very low, though they still may overestimate it by ten times. They may put it at 1 in 100."

He himself would have said the odds were "1 in 1000."

But the day after the crisis ended, on Monday, October 29, he informed me that his boss, Paul Nitze, had just told him that he had put the chance of some form of nuclear war, if we had struck the missiles on Cuba, as "fairly high." And his estimate of the risk, Nitze thought, was the lowest in the Excom; everyone else put it higher.

Harry had asked him what odds he would have given. Nitze's answer was:

"1 in 10."

I remember vividly my reaction, that Monday, to this news. It came in two parts.

First, puzzlement: why would they put the risk that high? How could they figure that either side was that ready to go to nuclear war? Could it be that Nitze, and the others, like the public, had not really absorbed the new intelligence on the strategic balance, or that they didn't fully believe it?

Second, slightly delayed: "One in ten??!! Of nuclear war?! ...And we were doing what we were doing?!"

(What the U.S. had been doing, by order of the Excom, included: (1) the blockade itself; (2) forcing Soviet submarines to surface; (3) high-level and low-level reconnaissance flights over Cuba; (4) a large-scale airborne alert with significant risk of accidents involving nuclear weapons; (5) continuing reconnaissance, even after several planes were fired on and one shot down on Saturday; (6) full preparations--if they were wholly a bluff, they fooled us--for invasion and airstrike...to which could be added (8) Robert Kennedy's official 48-hour ultimatum on Saturday night and the warning he delivered that if a second recon plane were shot down the airstrike would follow immediately...)

I believed that the stakes in this confrontation, in global political terms, were quite high. I was prepared to support non-nuclear threats, willing to take some risks of conventional war; I was, in short, a cold warrior working for the Defense Department.

But to be willing to take a 10% chance of nuclear war?...In order to avoid a public trade of the Turkish missiles?

Who were these people I was working for? Were the civilians no better than the military? Was the President insane?

I would not have felt better if I had known what Ted Sorenson revealed later about the President's own odds during the crisis that it would end in general nuclear war<sup>ii</sup>:

"Somewhere between one out of three and even."

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<sup>i.</sup> (p. 11) See attached OpEd piece by me, "The Day Castro Almost Started World War III," New York Times, October 31, 1988.

<sup>ii.</sup> (p. 13) See Theodore Sorenson, Kennedy, New York, Bantam Books, 1965, p. 795.

There is a tendency now to conclude that Kennedy's odds on the likelihood of general war were exaggerated. I, on the contrary, have come to believe that Kennedy's odds were realistic, and that my own estimate at the time was far too low. My judgment--when I was 31 and had never been in a war--that Khrushchev was sure to back down because of the military odds against him does not look good in the light of events of the last quarter century. Leaders, men of power, challenged to accept a humiliating setback, do not often back down when they "ought" to in terms of an objective appraisal of the odds and the long-range interests of their citizens.

It may well be that John F. Kennedy understood this at the time--for himself as well as for Khrushchev--better than I did, and that that was the basis for his higher estimate of the dangers. The fact that Khrushchev did back down I see as the result of special, threatening circumstances, of which President Kennedy and the Excom remained largely unaware. (See my op-ed piece and Seymour Hersh's article, attached.)

Thursday, September 15, 2011  
9:56 AM

\Cuba-II\IF...

Toward **no** war:

--**K/Dobrynin tells RFK Saturday night** (in response to RFK's warning that one more plane shot down will unleash an air attack and almost surely, invasion):

--"We don't control Castrol's antiaircraft gunners."

And/or:--"We have nuclear warheads on Cuba for MRBMs"

And --"K did not order the shoot-down of the U-2 this morning"

And --"We have FROG (Luna) nuclear warheads in Cuba" (and FKR cruise missiles and warheads)

And --"We have delegated authority to use the FROG missiles against an invasion" (they could say this, even though K had withdrawn delegation on Oct. 22, and reconfirmed this on Oct. 27: however, he wasn't sure he was in control, and for good reason, on Oct. 27, after SAM firing and Castro letter)

And --"We have forty thousand Soviet troops on the island" (!)

There could **not** have been any further consideration by JFK or his advisors of invasion of the island.

There **could** and probably would have been a decision for air attack on the SAMs (and perhaps AA) and MRBMs if another US plane were shot down. (The FROGs, presumably harder to locate and destroy, entirely, would still deter invasion). That might have come unconditionally, even before another US plane were shot down, Sunday morning.

OR, if JFK and McNamara worried that an MRBM might actually be fired (even against Khrushchev's orders) under attack, JFK might have ordered the Cordier ploy and "responded" to U Thant's request for a Cuban-Turkey missile trade. In other words, the revelation of nuclear warheads for the MRBMs might be enough to deter an air attack, as well.

(Was JFK only determined to avoid an invasion—even though he did **not** expect it to lead to a nuclear response—or was he just as determined to avoid an air attack? In either case, he feared a Soviet response on Turkey and/or Berlin. (Note the hinted warnings the Soviets had given about reopening the Berlin question after the election).

Thus, even if he revealed these true conditions, K could not have counted on deterring an air attack (unless, perhaps, he delegated authority to his MRBMs to fire under attack, and communicated this plausibly, not entirely easy to make plausible; and indeed, “irresponsible,” since the US could not be counted on to believe it and be deterred. After all, K had chosen not to defy the blockade, as he could have: ordered his ships to keep moving (which would have been legal: the US “quarantine” was illegal), and ordered his submarines to defend themselves (with nuclear torpedos?!)).

Either way, the JCS would be frustrated in their desire to see an invasion of Cuba.

What, exactly, could the US have done about the phenomenon of Khrushchev’s delegation of authority to the FROGs? How much could they even protest or condemn it: seeing that it mirrored the (actual) uncertainty—to say the least—about the ability of field commanders in Europe, equipped with tactical nuclear weapons, to use their weapons under attack? (Was Khrushchev’s delegation any more irresponsible?)

Granted, JFK was in the process of putting PALs on the forward-based weapons. When did this take effect? And how high up in the chain of command was the code for the PALS held? That’s still not on the public record. (Does the president really know? Consider the settings on Minuteman missiles, as revealed by Blair).

Remember the recommendations of the Twining Committee in 1964, just two years later, that field commanders **should** be delegated authority! And Goldwater’s proposal!

Conceivably, a really tough US response to these revelations—which the JCS, or at least LeMay (perhaps not Taylor) would have pressed strongly—could have been:

“Then you’d better give your missile and FROG commanders new orders, and you’d better be sure they obey them (cross your fingers! And take the warheads off, and guard them with your most disciplined troops) because if you don’t start removing those missiles tomorrow (or if another plane is shot down) we ARE going to attack and invade, and you’ve got to hope that no one disobeys your orders, because that will mean the total extermination of the Soviet Union.”

But that’s not JFK. It would mean consciously risking the loss of an American city, followed by the loss of Europe. As Kaysen put it to me in 1961, “You’ve got to consider the properties of the information channel.”

(Could **this** ultimatum—recognizing the possibility of Soviet nuclear FU in response to a US attack on Cuba—have been countered by Khrushchev’s revealing in detail the Soviet **second-strike threat to Europe?** This could have been the answer to the Gilpatric speech (my speech). It would have undercut US claims of “superiority” as a basis for maintaining military access to Berlin. The truth was, Europe was a hostage. But the Soviets never made a point of this (and it was, indeed, oddly missing from US

calculations). There were precursors of this in Khrushchev's oblique threats, to McCloy (over Berlin) and earlier over Suez, of the small number of missiles necessary to destroy Britain, and the true fact that they had more than enough for this. Of course, that would have accompanied by the devastation of the USSR (though Khrushchev, mistakenly, spoke of the USSR recovering from this; the reality was that the US would recover from what the USSR could attack with at that time, but the USSR could not, any more than Europe: that was the message in my proposed JFK talk to Khrushchev, only obliquely expressed in my Gilpatric speech. Still, as second-strike by the Soviets, Europe would go: and the US could not prevent this, ever.

That was somehow never used by Khrushchev to "destroy" NATO planning, to expose it as a Doomsday Machine (at least, regionally). Nor was it used by Brezhnev! The actual parity he achieved by the late-Sixties would have been the perfect basis for proposing a NFU (no-first-use) policy that would invalidate NATO planning. Why didn't he?

Perhaps because Soviet planning really was based on FU (until the Eighties' planning for a non-nuclear blitz; OK, why not then propose NFU? And challenge NATO to make any rational sense out of a FU posture?! The Soviets were counting, wrongly, on a no-early-FU NATO policy, as the less-irrational expression of a FU strategy; but it would still have been mad, almost as much as the actual, likely early-FU posture.

Note that the Saturday night ultimatum by RFK was a **bluff**, with respect to the 48-hour ultimatum. (Did RFK know this? He and JFK did not expect it to work. Did he know of the JFK-Rusk Cordier ploy? Probably so! A **big** secret, he kept from me!) However, the other warning—of an immediate attack if another plane was shot down—was not a bluff, and Khrushchev would have appreciated that.

However RFK put it to Dobrynin—whether or not Dobrynin is right in saying that RFK warned of US military being out of control in that case—K would have understood that it would probably be carried out: and that **he** was not in control of events, as of morning light. His only control (to avoid an air attack: followed—if he did **not** make the revelations above—by invasion) was to start removing the missiles **before** the morning US reconnaissance flights. Otherwise, he would probably lose his missiles in Cuba (and some Russian troops), challenging him either to accept this humiliation and loss or to undertake very risky actions against Turkey or Berlin.

Either of these would have had to come in the face of demonstrably aggressive US leadership. Khrushchev had already decided these were not worthwhile (in deciding on Wednesday to remove the missiles, under the best terms available), and they would be even less promising (though more "necessary" if he were to save his face and keep his job) than before the attack on Cuba. He would probably have done nothing (though..can one count on this?!)

--K doesn't act to dismantle missiles early Sunday morning, **but** Cuban AA continues to miss American recon planes that morning. (OR: Dobrynin warns about Cuban AA, JFK cancels recon flights for Sunday morning!); JFK orders Cordier to have U Thant request a trade, which JFK accepts Sunday evening; crisis ends, Soviets win (diplomatic parity);

NATO is undermined, though relieved (British had favored deal with their Thors) (de Gaulle is confirmed in his determination to have independent deterrent; conceivably Germans do too?!)

Republicans win big in 1962 November elections (? Possibly not: hard to predict American reaction; note JFK's popularity after Bay of Pigs); Keating becomes presidential candidate (RFK/JFK first reaction on learning of missiles); JFK does not win in 1964, even if he lives; if there was any assassination plotting in JCS/CIA even after his "victory" in Cuba-II (there was a mood for it! As I saw personally, reflecting simply the lack of air attack and invasion, even though Soviet missiles were removed and—so far as the JCS knew (?) there was no deal), it would be confirmed and sped up.

IF (for war):

--Cuban AA had hit the fuel line on American plane on Saturday afternoon;

--The recommendation of Dean Acheson, the JCS including LeMay, and “most” of the ExComm for an immediate airstrike had been accepted, followed by invasion, not immediately (Oct. 16-23) but after arrival of warheads:

**nucs against US invaders, SIOP, Europe destroyed directly, the rest of the world by nuclear winter.**

**Or: nucs against US invaders, US tac nucs used against Sovs, missiles, SAMS, Cuba troop concentrations in Cuba; war limited to Cuba**

**Or: above, but Sovs attack Turkey or close access to Berlin, ...SIOP eventually**

(even without these): 40,000 Soviet troops encountered (plus Cuban guerrilla warfare: not yet experienced in Vietnam or Laos (thanks to JFK’s rejections in 1961!), or experienced by the US since the Philippines). (See CINCLANT TS plans for invasion in mid-1961, not yet with a counter-guerrilla annex, though they were intended to confront a regime that had come to power, only a few years earlier, by guerrilla warfare, and an army still organized for this.

Note that these plans which I saw in June 1961 were the fore-runner to the invasion plans ordered by McNamara in 1962, brought up to operational status as of October 1962, rehearsed in exercises in 1962. **And note** that the invasion plans—first exposed by Hershberg—and exercises almost certainly did **not** at all allow for the presence of 40,000 Soviet troops (or even the 3000/13,000 estimated during the crisis! Were they adapted during the crisis for this?!

Acheson’s headline in his Esquire article, “**The triumph of pure dumb luck**” is absolutely right, in an inverted sense! (Yes, it was “lucky” that K backed down, without an invasion; otherwise, **Acheson’s** fatheaded militarism would have meant that Acheson was **Present at the Destruction**, thanks to his own advice!

(Acheson’s title applies to the entire 66-year nuclear era: its failure to produce another nuclear explosion on people (except for the Lucky Dragon: one immediate death from fallout). Yes, human decisions to make nuclear threats (of first-use or second-use), and in some cases human decisions to be deterred by them, played a role (luckily), as in Cuba-II.

But as in Cuba-II, the process came close to exploding (more likely than not: failure to explode was “lucky”) several times, and was continuously open to accident or unauthorized action (unlikely in any short period—except during intense crises like Cuba

or Berlin or Gulf War—but cumulatively, likely: failure to explode yet has been lucky, the occurrence of a less-likely phenomenon).

--The “third man” on the Russian submarine, who refused to agree to the use of a nuclear torpedo against the US ship that was bombarding it with depth charges, had been ignored by the two who approved the firing: leading to the disappearance of a US Navy ship by a nuclear explosion (possibly a missile).

See above consequences.

(1249 words: two 25-minute sessions, each about 600 words).

--NO RFK ultimatum—or meeting—with Dobrynin on Saturday night. (OR he omits warning on “next shoot-down,” and K doesn’t assume it: since first shoot-down didn’t produce US attack). Khrushchev continues to temporize, hoping to get JFK to accept the Saturday morning offer of an open trade with Turkish missiles. Before U Thant receives or acts on US secret initiative, the Cubans succeed in shooting down a US plane.

--The U-2 incident over the Soviet Union, the firing of the missile from Vandenberg, the airborne alert are misread by the Soviets as precursors to US attack; leading them, along with **Castro’s** urging (especially if there were an air attack on the Cuban missiles) to launch a preemptive attack. (Perhaps they really were incapable of this, especially not being on alert; but they could have gone on alert.)

**--JFK carries out his earlier commitment** to attack the SAMs and AA when the U-2 is shot down (by a local Soviet commander, under Cuban pressure!) and this leads, with JCS (and ExComm?) urging to full attack on the MRBMs followed by invasion. End of the world.

--The car from Khrushchev’s dacha breaks down or has an accident on the way to the Moscow Radio station; the US doesn’t get the word of the Soviet backdown, before a US plane is shot down and an air attack is in process. (JFK could still have aborted plans, but would have been under great pressure to proceed). (The Soviets, fearing this possibility of car accident and the consequences of even an hour’s delay, were not aware of JFK’s readiness to concede).

--LeMay’s proposal to attack and invade “anyway” (not likely to be accepted by JFK or the ExComm) on Sunday morning, would have led to the consequences above: end of the world (starting with the Soviet Union and Europe, whether or not China: had plans been sufficiently modified by then to exclude China? Would it have been hit, or not? PACOM restraint?)

(2218 words: 11:47 AM)

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Tuesday, September 20, 2011

Odds II

What ended the crisis; and how it might have ended, differently

There is a tendency now to conclude that Kennedy's odds on the likelihood of general war were exaggerated. I, on the contrary, have come to believe that Kennedy's odds were realistic, and that my own estimate at the time was far too low. My judgment--when I was 31 and had never been in a war--that Khrushchev was sure to back down because of the military odds against him does not look good in the light of events of the last quarter century. Leaders, men of power, challenged to accept a humiliating setback, do not often back down when they "ought" to in terms of an objective appraisal of the odds and the long-range interests of their citizens.

It may well be that John F. Kennedy understood this at the time--for himself as well as for Khrushchev--better than I did, and that that was the basis for his higher estimate of the dangers. The fact that Khrushchev did back down I see as the result of his appreciation of special, threatening circumstances, of which President Kennedy and the ExComm remained largely unaware.

Khrushchev was made aware, by RFK's ultimatum on Saturday night, that as of first light the next morning, he would be out of control of the slide toward nuclear war. The likelihood of nuclear war would depend, in the first instance, on the accuracy of Cuban anti-aircraft gunners, which had been improving during the afternoon of Saturday. If he left the missiles in place throughout Saturday night in Cuba (afternoon and evening in Moscow), he would subsequently be unable to prevent either a likely event Sunday morning--the downing of an American low-level reconnaissance plane by the Cubans--or to reduce decisively the likelihood that it would result in all-out nuclear war. That would follow from the loss of his missiles to American attack, an American invasion of Cuba, the use of Soviet tactical nuclear weapons against the American invasion force (if there had not already been an unauthorized launch of a Soviet MRBM against Florida, under attack), and all-out US nuclear attack on the Soviet Union.

He could prevent this course of events only by ordering the missiles to begin to be dismantled before morning in Cuba and informing the American president of this reliably before American recon planes began flying over Cuba. (JFK had, in fact, cancelled night recon flights Saturday night out of concern that the flares they dropped would be interpreted as an attack, jumping the gun on his 48-hour ultimatum. But morning recon flights were definitely on.)

Alternatively, Khrushchev could have considered, at this late moment, informing Kennedy of the facts of the situation which he had so far chosen to conceal. He would have done better to reconsider that concealment as soon as the warheads were in Cuba, by the beginning of the blockade on Wednesday, October 24. He could then, in effect, have announced that the blockade had failed in its principal objective. But at this point (Sunday morning in Moscow) he could hardly be sure that this message would get through to the president during the night of October 27-28, in DC, or be absorbed and acted on by the president by morning (canceling the recon flights: and probably, any intention of invading or even attacking the missiles).

Would this information have stopped U.S. plans, or hastened them, to attack the SAMs and missiles? That would depend on McNamara's and JFK's concern for unauthorized firing of the Soviet MRBMs under attack. Consider Kennedy's desire, which came through to me Saturday night, to assure that Turks not be able to fire the IRBMs if they were under attack. They couldn't be less worried than that about the prospect of a local Soviet initiative, especially if Khrushchev had just openly contradicted our earlier assumptions about Soviet caution in deploying warheads abroad. (Twenty years later, Tom Schelling was saying at a conference on the crisis that it was

“inconceivable” that Khrushchev would actually have sent the actual warheads to Cuba). It would still have been beyond American imagination in 1962 that he might have delegated control of tactical nuclear missiles to a local commander, or that the shootdown of the U-2 that morning had not been on his orders. Probably he wouldn’t have chosen to pass that along, though an advisor familiar with Schelling’s work could have noted to him that that information would have been even more effectively deterrent against American attack.

Just the tacit prospect of a local Soviet response, against orders, would almost surely have prevented an airstrike by Kennedy and McNamara as well as an invasion, despite objections from the JCS. Yes, Khrushchev would appear reckless and irresponsible to the world (though no more so than NATO nuclear deployments in Europe or Turkey, if Khrushchev had made that point). But he would have won the duel. Either the missiles would have stayed in Cuba or have been traded off publicly for those in Turkey.

[(Why *didn’t* he do this earlier, say on Wednesday? The blockade having **failed** to prevent the delivery of nuclear warheads! He had a potential win in his hands. Perhaps he feared that even the threat that tactical nuclear warheads might be used might not deter an American invasion—that his delegation might be challenged and the Americans would demand it be changed, and act on the expectation that it would be (just as RFK demanded that firing on American recon planes, by the Cubans, be stopped).]

Still, by Wednesday, or Friday, his position on Cuba was as strong as it would ever be, as proof against American invasion plans or attack as it would be by mid-November. However, he had not foreseen that when he announced his deployment in mid-November he would be facing an American blockade in place and public demands by the president that he remove them; by Wednesday, he was facing an enemy who was pulling on the knot in the rope of war. That’s a reason why telling JFK on Saturday night was too late, too risky. But again, why not on Wednesday? What did he have to lose, by telling JFK the real state of affairs? (Did he realize the American uncertainty on this issue—and their total failure to imagine that he had done something he seems to have regarded as natural: provide warheads for FROG missiles (which the Soviets had never done before, with an overseas deployment, as to Egypt), and delegate their use to local commanders (on the fatheaded belief that this would not lead to two-sided nuclear war, whether limited or not, since it didn’t affect the American mainland. This was as fatuous as the Kissinger belief that nuclear war in Europe could be limited from destroying Europe entirely or spreading to the Soviet Union and the US.)

Dr. Strangelove phenomenon: the unrevealed Doomsday Machine.

[Question: DID JFK cancel recon flights Sunday morning, on getting the message from Khrushchev? If not (I would guess not) were they fired on? Did Khrushchev prevail on Castro to order his gunners not to fire? (Had orders to the SAM commanders and MRBM commanders not to fire except on Khrushchev’s direct orders been sent AND RECEIVED by Soviets in Cuba by Saturday night? It wasn’t clear in Moscow just what had happened about the U-2 shoot-down for hours on Saturday, or even longer. Alexeev seems to have believed it was Cubans who had shot it down for twenty years or more.)

[Note: from the onset of “nuclear plenty” in about 1950/52—not 1945-50, when atomic weapons were targeted in planning only on cities—the capability of nuclear weapons to destroy **military** targets, especially those capable of nuclear attack (thus, high-value, and requiring prompt attack)—was exploited by planners. (The nuclear warhead—especially the H-bomb--can promise wide-area attack, destruction of protected underground centers, and very fast attack, possibly by surprise, by ICBMs, thus, preemptive. Prior to the H-bomb, the A-bomb wasn’t susceptible to use by ICBMs, except very large ones (the SS-6), so couldn’t be so effective in preemption. )

Hyp: that’s why SAC was so oriented to fast reaction to an intention and order to attack: for preemption, especially before ICBMs were available with H-bomb warheads; planes could get in first only if they could get into the air very fast on order. That may have been rationalized not by the need for a surprise attack or a preemptive attack, but by “avoiding being destroyed” by enemy first-strike.) The public rationale for the fast-reaction alert was to prevent our planes from being destroyed on the ground; but the real rationale for getting them in the air very fast on an order to do so was to get them over the Soviet Union as fast as possible to destroy *their* planes and missiles on the ground.

Why was this not publicized? Because it immediately drew attention to the incentive, and plan, to preempt on warning, as early as possible, preferably before any (or many) of their vehicles had been committed and launched (or preventively, escalating from a conflict: if not, a U.S. surprise attack in a non-crisis period or in a concealed or denied crisis). And that would raise the question, in the public mind, of the likely Soviet retaliation, even to the best-executed preemptive or preventive attack.

That was especially true of air-bases—hard to destroy with conventional bombs—and underground command and control centers, and targets defended by air defenses (where only a few attacking vehicles or bombs might get through). (Brodie even imagined that H-bombs offered hope of destroying widely-dispersed conventional troops: with air-bursts?) To multiply **land-based** offensive targets is to encourage the enemy to multiply nuclear warheads to be able to destroy them preemptively (vs. a fixed number of cities as targets), enhancing the chance of widespread destruction (even of allies and neutrals) by fallout (and smoke: nuclear winter). And those enemy missiles and warheads, in turn, encourage the multiplication of missiles (land- or sea-based) with which to preemptively destroy **them**: a self-reinforcing process.

Imagine if missiles had remained highly inaccurate, incapable of destroying hardened silos of land-based missiles except by huge multiples of attacking missiles. Thus, targets had remained cities only (and air-bases) and subs in port. And/or only submarine missiles had been deployed, without increases in accuracy. Then nothing but minimum deterrence would have “made sense;”; conceivably a side that could threaten total devastation when the other can threaten only a few cities could still threaten first use backed up by a coercive strategy (if you hit some of our cities, we will utterly annihilate you). But if each can destroy at least a sizeable part (does it really take 1/3 or 1/4 of population? How about Bundy’s ten cities, or twenty cities? York’s “closer to one than one hundred”: 49 at most?

To neutralize the threat of a coercive strategy?

But with increased accuracy, then land-based missiles become “invitations to preempt” for the adversary (and if the

adversary has land-based missiles also—as does Russia—then it becomes an invitation to use them preemptively. If the Russians can be expected to keep land-based missiles (because of their problems with sub-based forces: ports, support, reliability, US anti-sub capabilities, communications) then there are two reasons for the US to eliminate its land-based missiles: to discourage Russian preemption, and to remove the chance for US preemption against Russian land-based missiles on a false alarm (assuming only false alarms are at all likely, or even possible). (Assuming US sub warheads are limited in number, if not accuracy and yield, enough to eliminate a threat to Russian land-based missiles; otherwise they could be tempted to preempt on a false alarm, and the Russians could be tempted to preempt, on a false alarm, against US ports, C3, air-bases).

So—the H-bomb encouraged fast-flying ICBMs against SU planes and missiles, despite their inaccuracy. This encouraged a SU ICBM capability, or IRBMs in Cuba! (if threats against Europe weren't enough! As my Gilpatric speech indicated!!) That would produce instability in crisis. (as well as arms-race instability). But with increased accuracy (which meant A-bomb warheads could be on ICBMs, and still be counter-force), and parity, land-based missiles became both unnecessary and dangerously destabilizing in crisis. With subs available, ...

The optimum-mix force—which allowed for cities to be hit immediately (it said nothing about sequencing, withholding, forces that could be held in reserve, holding cities as hostages: just for forces “large enough” to be capable to hitting both cities (obviously) and military targets—proposed in 1959-60 preceded the demonstration of an effective submarine force, and presumed early Soviet deployment of land-based missiles (as targets, and threats).

Suppose it had been addressed assuming the existence of SU sub forces (when did they come in?), and no or small ICBM forces (the reality, for the next five years): how could it have rationalized the prompt destruction of cities? OR the importance of a preemptive capability (essentially infeasible)?

Tuesday, September 20, 2011  
 Odds II

What ended the crisis; and how it might have ended, differently

There is a tendency now to conclude that Kennedy's odds on the likelihood of general war were exaggerated. I, on the contrary, have come to believe that Kennedy's odds were realistic<sup>1</sup>, and that my own estimate at the time was far too low. My judgment--when I was 31 and had never been in a war--that Khrushchev was sure to back down because of the military odds against him does not look good in the light of events of the last quarter century. Leaders, men of power, challenged to accept a humiliating setback, do not often back down when they "ought" to in terms of an objective appraisal of the odds and the long-range interests of their citizens.

It may well be that John F. Kennedy understood this at the time--for himself as well as for Khrushchev--better than I did, and that that was the basis for his higher estimate of the dangers. The fact that Khrushchev did back down I see as the result of his appreciation of special, threatening circumstances, of which President Kennedy and the ExComm remained largely unaware.

Khrushchev was made aware, by RFK's ultimatum on Saturday night, that as of first light the next morning, he would be out of control of the slide toward nuclear war. The likelihood of nuclear war would depend, in the first instance, on the accuracy of Cuban anti-aircraft gunners, which had been improving during the afternoon of Saturday. If he left the missiles in place throughout Saturday night in Cuba (afternoon and evening in Moscow), he would subsequently be unable to prevent either a likely event Sunday morning--the downing of an American low-level reconnaissance plane by the Cubans--or to reduce decisively the likelihood that it would result in all-out nuclear war. That would follow from the loss of his missiles to American attack, an American invasion of Cuba, the use of Soviet tactical nuclear weapons against the American invasion force (if there had not already been an unauthorized launch of a Soviet MRBM against Florida, under attack), and all-out US nuclear attack on the Soviet Union.

He could prevent this course of events only by ordering the missiles to begin to be dismantled before morning in Cuba and informing the American president of this reliably before American recon planes began flying over Cuba. (JFK had, in fact, cancelled night recon flights Saturday night out of concern that the flares they dropped would be interpreted as an attack, jumping the gun on his 48-hour ultimatum. But morning recon flights were definitely on.)

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<sup>1</sup> Saturday, October 8, 2011: If he thought there was a 1/3 chance or higher that Khrushchev was consciously willing to confront the US with a choice between the SIOP and humiliating defeat, he was wrong; K definitely did not want war, at all, and he didn't want to take a move that have even a moderate risk of all-out war (he foolishly didn't think a tactical nuclear attack on the invasion force risked that!); he never gave much thought to expanding the conflict to Turkey or Berlin, though JFK thought that "certain." BUT he might have been wrong; Gromyko and Dobrynin, quoted by McNamara from the Moscow conference, were sure that the Soviets would have responded militarily elsewhere: which in most cases, would have fulfilled JFK's fears. However, there was at least a 1/3 chance that a US invasion would have evoked a nuclear war **in Cuba**, against the invasion force, possibly or probably escalating to all-out war, something that the Americans gave no thought to at all (except for the possibility of an unauthorized MRBM launch, also possible).

Alternatively, Khrushchev could have considered, at this late moment, informing Kennedy of the facts of the situation which he had so far chosen to conceal. He would have done better to reconsider that concealment as soon as the warheads were in Cuba, by the beginning of the blockade on Wednesday, October 24. But at this point (Sunday morning in Moscow) he could hardly be sure that this message would get through to the president during the night of October 27-28, in DC, or be absorbed and acted on by the president by morning (canceling the recon flights: and probably, any intention of invading or even attacking the missiles).

Would this information have stopped U.S. plans, or hastened them, to attack the SAMs and missiles? That would depend on McNamara's and JFK's concern for unauthorized firing of the Soviet MRBMs under attack. Consider Kennedy's extreme concern, which came through to me Saturday night, that Turks not be able to fire the IRBM if they were under attack. They couldn't be less worried than that about the prospect of a local Soviet initiative, especially if Khrushchev had openly contradicted our earlier assumptions about Soviet caution in deploying warheads abroad. (Twenty years later, Tom Schelling was saying at a conference on the crisis that it was "inconceivable" that Khrushchev would actually have sent the actual warheads to Cuba). It would still have been beyond American imagination in 1962 that he might have delegated control of tactical nuclear missiles to a local commander, or that the shootdown of the U-2 that morning had not been on his orders. Probably he wouldn't have chosen to pass that along, though Schelling would have noted that that information would have been even more effectively deterrent against American attack.

Just the prospect of a local response, against orders, would have prevented an airstrike as well as an invasion, despite objections from the JCS. Yes, Khrushchev would appear reckless and irresponsible to the world (though no more so than NATO nuclear deployments in Europe or Turkey, if Khrushchev had made that point). But he would have won the duel. Either the missiles would have stayed in Cuba or have been traded off publicly for those in Turkey.

(Why didn't he do this earlier, say on Wednesday? The blockade having **failed** to prevent the delivery of nuclear warheads! He had a potential win in his hands. Perhaps he feared that even the threat that tactical nuclear warheads might be used might not deter an American invasion—that his delegation might be challenged and the Americans would demand it be changed, and act on the expectation that it would be (just as RFK demanded that firing on American recon planes, by the Cubans, be stopped).

Still, by Wednesday, or Friday, his position on Cuba was as strong as it would ever be, as proof against American invasion plans or attack as it would be by mid-November. However, he had not foreseen that when he announced his deployment in mid-November he would be facing an American blockade in place and public demands by the president that he remove them; by Wednesday, he was facing an enemy who was pulling on the knot in the rope of war. That's a reason why telling JFK on Saturday night was too late, too risky. But again, why not on Wednesday? What did he have to lose, by telling JFK the real state of affairs? (Did he realize the American uncertainty on this issue—and their total failure to imagine that he had done something he seems to have regarded as natural: provide warheads for FROG missiles (which the Soviets had never done before, with an overseas deployment, as to Egypt), and delegate their use to local commanders (on the fatheaded belief that this would not lead to two-sided nuclear war, whether limited or not, since it didn't affect the American mainland. This was as fatuous as the Kissinger belief that nuclear war in Europe could be limited from destroying Europe entirely or spreading to the Soviet Union and the US.

[Question: DID JFK cancel recon flights Sunday morning, on getting the message from Khrushchev? If not (I would guess not) were they fired on? Did Khrushchev prevail on Castro to order his gunners not to fire? (Had orders to the SAM commanders and MRBM commanders not to fire except on Khrushchev's direct orders been sent AND RECEIVED by Soviets in Cuba by Saturday night? It wasn't clear in Moscow just what had happened about the U-2 shoot-down for hours on Saturday, or even longer. Alexeev seems to have believed it was Cubans who had shot it down for twenty years or more.)

[Note: from the onset of "nuclear plenty" in about 1950/52—not 1945-50, when atomic weapons were targeted in planning only on cities—the capability of nuclear weapons to destroy **military** targets, especially those capable of nuclear attack (thus, high-value, and requiring prompt attack)—was exploited by planners. (The nuclear warhead—especially the H-bomb--can promise wide-area attack, destruction of protected underground centers, and very fast attack, possibly by surprise, by ICBMs, thus, preemptive. Prior to the H-bomb, the A-bomb wasn't susceptible to use by ICBMs, except very large ones (the SS-6), so couldn't be so effective in preemption. )

Hyp: that's why SAC was so oriented to fast reaction to an intention and order to attack: for preemption, especially before ICBMs were available with H-bomb warheads; planes could get in first only if they could get into the air very fast on order. That may have been rationalized not by the need for a surprise attack or a preemptive attack, but by "avoiding being destroyed" by enemy first-strike.)

That was especially true of air-bases—hard to destroy with conventional bombs—and underground command and control centers, and targets defended by air defenses (where only a few attacking vehicles or bombs might get through). (Brodie even imagined that H-bombs offered hope of destroying widely-dispersed conventional troops: with air-bursts?) To multiply **land-based** offensive targets is to encourage the enemy to multiply nuclear warheads to be able to destroy them preemptively (vs. a fixed number of cities as targets), enhancing the chance of widespread destruction (even of allies and neutrals) by fallout (and smoke: nuclear winter). And those enemy missiles and warheads, in turn, encourage the multiplication of missiles (land- or sea-based) with which to preemptively destroy **them**: a self-reinforcing process.

Imagine if missiles had remained highly inaccurate, incapable of destroying hardened silos of land-based missiles except by huge multiples of attacking missiles. Thus, targets had remained cities only (and air-bases) and subs in port. And/or only submarine missiles had been deployed, without increases in accuracy. Then nothing but minimum deterrence would have "made sense,"; conceivably a side that could threaten total devastation when the other can threaten only a few cities could still threaten first use backed up by a coercive strategy (if you hit some of our cities, we will utterly annihilate you). But if each can destroy at least a sizeable part (does it really take 1/3 or 1/4 of population? How about Bundy's ten cities, or twenty cities? York's "closer to one than one hundred": 49 at most?)

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Tuesday, October 11, 2011

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Before the Oct. 22 speech by JFK, McNamara—and almost certainly the president—foresaw the crisis ending with a deal that would represent a diplomatic victory for Khrushchev: a public trade of the Soviet missiles in Cuba for the NATO missiles in Turkey and perhaps Italy (and even England!), perhaps all US troops and equipment out of Turkey (in exchange for Soviets out of Cuba), and withdrawal from Guantanamo. He saw that as acceptable for the US: certainly preferable to the consequences of attacking the missiles or invading Cuba.

[(The rage of the JCS...)(The congress? The public? JFK foresaw that to move toward such a deal before any military action and instead of the blockade would result in his impeachment; this may well have been right (whereas it was a fantasy for LBJ, in spring 1964). But after the tension of the week of Oct. 22, and on the appeal of U Thant...hard to predict. What consequences did JFK expect—what was he willing to accept—if he had implemented the Cordier ploy on Oct. 28?]

As of the evening of Oct. 26 and the morning of Oct. 27, JFK was clearly of this mind. (See the proposal of the Turkey deal by RFK that evening, and JFK's willingness on Saturday morning, Oct. 27 to accept it, as proposed publicly by Khrushchev.

Meanwhile, Khrushchev had decided by the 24<sup>th</sup> or 25<sup>th</sup> (check dates) that his missiles could not be kept on the island without it being invaded. He rejected the counter-threat of moving on Berlin (and never considered an attack on Turkey).<sup>1</sup> He had decided to withdraw the missiles; from then on, he was simply haggling over the price (though continuing to rush the completion of the installations: why? To make an invasion—even though inevitable, if he didn't withdraw—look more dangerous, and make some sort of deal more acceptable to the US? What terms was he hoping for? ((apparently not Turkey, prior to the suggestions of Lippman and RFK). Some “assurances” on Cuba, of the sort that JFK did offer publicly on Oct. 27?

Thus, each leader was secretly ready to settle the crisis on terms acceptable to the other, without armed conflict—terms that would represent a clear diplomatic victory for the other--days before Saturday, October 27. Yet there was a

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<sup>1</sup> (He seems not to have considered revealing either the presence of 42,000 Soviet troops or tactical nuclear weapons with nuclear warheads for both the tactical and intermediate-range missiles on the island: an astounding omission—apparently motivated by earlier considerations no longer relevant—comparable to the lack of camouflaging for the missiles (and failure to shoot at the U-2's earlier!) and the persistent “camouflaging” of the Soviet troops!)

Each was properly afraid of what might happen once lives had been taken on either or both sides. The need to retaliate—an eye for an eye, “plus ten percent” (as Kissinger once put it)—to punish, to avenge, to restore honor and credibility, would soon wrest control of events out of the hands of either of the leaders, creating a dynamic context in which lower-level military commanders and even individual soldiers would make irreversible decisions that would spur the process on.

They were right. The accidental flight of a U-2 three hundred miles into Soviet territory, causing the scrambling of Soviet fighter planes attempting to shoot it down; Castro’s order to his antiaircraft gunners to fire on low-level US recon planes; Cubans’ successful urging of Soviet commanders in Cuba to shoot down the U-2 with a SAM (both of the latter misinterpreted in Washington as deliberate escalations by Khrushchev, a “new pattern” (making it appear unlikely that Khrushchev would remove the missiles, if at all, for anything less than a full public removal of the Turkish missiles, and perhaps more than that: removal of US planes and perhaps all forces from Turkey, perhaps the same for Italy and England: when actually, he was already prepared to accept removal for a simple assurance of no invasion of Cuba...))

The secret trade was not necessary to the deal, by Saturday night (or earlier that day) (though JFK was ready that morning to make a public trade; and had considered it probably necessary since much earlier, perhaps by Oct. 17,

There really **was** a significant risk that the crisis would get out of control, explode

Each of the leaders recognized this.

Each was determined to keep this from happening.

Yet, each kept the tacit “bargaining” (TCS) going, delaying revealing his bottom line (and his determination not to accept undue risk either of loss of control or of the other’s escalation), accepting *some* risk of explosion,

Which risk was actually larger than he realized (though not as large as they pretended to be willing to accept or pose, or as the public imagined)

Their decisions, accepting some risk (which they regarded as small, underestimating it) interacted to create a much larger risk, quite high by Saturday night

Although, on the other hand, each overestimated the other's willingness to risk, and underrated their readiness to compromise. This meant the risk was really less than it might have been, since each really was determined to prevent an explosion.

JFK was secretly making preparations to make concessions to head off an American attack, probably by the next day, which he didn't dare expose to most of his own ExComm; indeed, he might well have feared that if those preparations became known in the Pentagon he would face military insubordination (if not immediately, later) and if they were carried out, impeachment. And Khrushchev, faced with what he knew, better than Kennedy, was the imminence of an American air attack on his forces in Cuba, did move swiftly to withdraw them.

As Stephen Pinker says of the crisis, the world was lucky that two leaders were at the helm who were so determined to resist their own hawks and compromise.

**Yet despite all this**, the world did come within a few feet, on one day, and a few hours on the next, of starting a violent process likely to end in the extinction of the human species and many others.

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10-2-11

Ex-Com as a Big Con: a consensus-building device (e.g. to bring along the republicans, Dillon and McCone, to the blockade); real decisions made by JFK within much smaller groups

Ignorance of ExComm of Mongoose, and of invasion plans; and of PSALM clearance; and of prior consideration of possible missiles.

(McCone knew of Mongoose—hence (?) his expectation of missiles, unlike (?) his intell estimators; but did even he know of invasion plans?

ExComm, in its ignorance, couldn't assess or even conceive of the importance of preventing US invasion as a SU aim, let alone, a or the principal aim. It looked like at least an effort to redress the strategic imbalance; but then, why was it done so covertly? And so urgently? Unless to make immediate use of it, say in Berlin. (Was this a motive at all? Has that ever come out—K intentions wrt Berlin, which he did say secretly he was about to reopen?)

F Those in the know about invasion plans, on the other hand, knew that the ExComm as a whole couldn't discuss this and that their corporate advice was worthless, even worse than useless (based on assumption that the SU was being more aggressive than it was.

Wouldn't an air attack inevitably have opened up the question of SU motives and revealed the prior invasion plans? Or not? Would JFK have really minded that coming out (or even Mongoose), since it would answer Republican claims that he was being too passive?

Gribkov: K wasn't thinking about Turkish missiles, as a major consideration (until RFK and Lippmann raised them?! And until he was looking for some face-saving cover for retreating!

It was the tactical weapons—first revealed by Gribkov in Havana in 1992 (30 years later!) that were really addressed to, indeed critical to, defense of Cuba. Yet they weren't "used" as deterrent threats at all, even in the height of the crisis! Did any of the Sovs, starting with K, ever notice or comment on the implications of the FAILURE to disclose them? (Even the MRBMs weren't explicitly admitted until October 28: WHY NOT? Has that ever been explained?)

That meant, like the Doomsday Machine in Strangelove, the "worst of all worlds": a defense/deterrent that wasn't used to deter and would not have deterred, a "defense" that would lead to destruction of Cuba if not of the world (in other words, it should have been a pure bluff even if it was threatened as a deterrent: as TCS believed K would have recognized and acted upon by not sending warheads at all, **just as neither side should**

**ever have implemented or permitted LOW—or thousands of warheads, scheduled for ground burst—even if they threatened that they existed! Or NATO FU!!! Or weapons without PALs, on ground or in subs.**

There is the moral question of making threats of actions that would be immoral to carry out. (Forbidden by Catholic ethics, but widely accepted as morally justified, and instrumentally justified, especially as “necessity.”) And the prudential question of threatening actions that would be insane, counterproductive, vastly destructive, to carry out (not only non-optimal, but suicidal, devastating to both and to neutrals. And in both cases, the risks of making preparations that make these threats more credible, but also more likely to be carried out even against the wishes of the leaders at the time.

Gribkov, p. 168: SU decision to seek a Fait Accompli (FA) contributed to the political capability, and even political pressure, on US president to respond forcefully: surprise, shock, furtiveness suggesting “guilty conscience,” (doing something wrong, something legitimately to be blocked by violence), dangerousness. ALSO the necessary lying to the president; rage, potential for humiliaton for being fooled and disregarded (especially, warnings: which actually came “too late”—which JFK could have been told by K, at some point); encouraging JFK to make a public warning, which greatly increased his commitment, his vulnerability to humiliation, loss of majority in Congress within a month (! After assurance by K he wouldn’t do this, an assurance in line with their earlier intimate relationship). **Why were Soviet diplomats at the UN and in DC kept in the dark, and led to deny missiles, even after Oct. 22 speech?**

Thus: Why was it a “crisis” at all? All above reasons, especially JFK’s prior warning, encouraged precisely by K’s assurances and secrecy (and followed by more deception, further increasing likelihood of a forceful reaction: **though in truth JFK WAS inclined to forego force and accept, if not the presence of the missiles, at least a humiliating trade, altering the “appearance of balance of power—i.e. (JFK) the reality of power-toward parity”** (as Gilpatrick had denied a year earlier): just as K had expected.

K’s expectation would have been fully justified if he HAD been able to achieve real surprise, and a FA revealed after the election. But how could he really have believed that US intelligence wouldn’t discover it? Especially with the absence of attempts to camouflage (he WAS successful in covering up transportation, more than US intell would have supposed, especially wrt Elint)! That struck me in my study; led to the hypothesis (Beschloss suggests: from Mikoyan, from me? ) that he thought JFK would cooperate in concealing it, as K had done wrt U-2 until the shootdown! NOT UNREALISTIC! See PSALM!

But even with PSALM, it couldn’t have been kept for weeks IF THE JCS AND CIA KNEW THAT JFK WASN’T IN THE PROCESS OF ATTEMPTING TO DESTROY THE MISSILES (JFK kept them hoping for that for a full week, but he couldn’t have held them off longer than that without at least a blockade, i.e. without revealing the presence before the election. Note that the NYT did HAVE the info (i.e. someone

leaked! WHO? Never revealed! Presumably military?!) by October 21, before the speech; he could only hold them off from printing for a day. (Note JFK questions: “How long before this leaks?”)

Why not postpone the whole deployment until after the election? Jesus Christ, JFK might well have invaded **before** the election, by October 20! Given the buildup before that; and even without it. So K needed the SAMS—but they were above all to keep off U-2s: they were in too late, relative to the deployment! IF they had been operational before construction on the sites (seen Oct. 14)—maybe the FA would have succeeded! **He needed to have started the SAM deployment earlier; or delayed the construction of the sites (after delivering the missiles and warheads).** After all, they were operational (the MRBMs, not the IRBMs) well before the election November 6; by October 26? They could have been delayed starting by a week. When were SAMS all operational, especially near the sites?

It does point to my hypothesis: that K was HOPING that the missiles wouldn’t be seen (unrealistic, “hare-brained”) (Note that “we” didn’t think he would be so reckless as to put them there at all—see NIE in February—but we certainly didn’t imagine “hare-brained” belief that the palm trees of Cuba would protect them from overhead recon!) but that he was COUNTING ON (or further hoping) that JFK

I.e., as I figured in my study, that it was timed to be discoverable, at worst, during a several-week period when JFK would be reluctant to attack, after which they would be invulnerable. He wanted the period of visibility-while-vulnerable (no warheads, not operational) to occur just before the election (see Rostow memo; example of 1960; and see British calculations before election of 1956, again getting it just backwards: Ike was MORE enraged at attempted FA just before election, potentially embarrassing him. K feared doing it AFTER election—might be too late (NOTE: I DIDN’T HAVE ANY CLUE OF THIS IN 1962, OR EVEN IN 1964! NOR DID MOST OF EXCOMM), and anyway, he thought JFK would then act during that vulnerable period (or blockade).

But the pressure on JFK (like Ike) was even greater before the election than after! (Imagine that DRV had deliberately attacked in Tonkin Gulf in August 1964 in the belief that LBJ would be too preoccupied to respond, or would want to keep it secret (which he could have, as well—or as ill—as JFK in 1962) (see silence on Israeli attack on Liberty in 1967, or on Iraqi use of gas at Halabja) during campaign: when reality would have been the opposite, McNamara (at least, if not LBJ) wanted to attack even when not sure there had been a DRV attack! (like Bush vs. Iraq)

(Compare Saddam’s deliberate ambiguity about his cooperation with the inspectors: apparently not to give up all deterrence against the Iranians! (Though what good did delay do, since he was going to give the inspectors access eventually?) And his confidence that Bush wouldn’t invade, apparently because he saw himself a potential ally of the US!) (But above all, HIS “doomsday machine” in 1990-91! Ask Ritter.)

**Was there a potential, at any stage, for Castro and Khrushchev to have revealed credibly the range and details of Mongoose operations? Didn't they have Mongoose penetrated?**

Wouldn't that have made it hard for JFK even to institute a blockade, even if K had made the deployment open and public from the start? Or deployed the tac nucs (alone), as a FA, then revealed them?! Why the MRBMs at all, given willingness to send tac nucs and Soviet troops? Presumably THEY were for Soviet purposes. (And US **ignorance** of the tac nucs fed the belief that the deployment was ONLY for SU strategic purposes, which looked ominous for Berlin, as well as lending themselves to the US cover story that they actually threatened the US.)

Gribkov 169: 18 MRBMs (of 36 on Cuba) were “ready to be fueled and mated with their warheads by 28 October. Not one had been programmed for flight.”

Gribkov: the deployment of 40,000 troops was managed successfully (a first for SU), with “(mainly) successful camouflaging, counterintelligence and disinformation”. OF TROOPS! Which should have been made known! While no camouflage of missile sites, once missiles had arrived!

Gen. WY Smith: [contrary to him: SU and Castro were **right** to fear or even expect an American invasion of Cuba: Republican and congressional calls, Oct. 2 planning directive, exercises, deployments, Mongoose (see initial plans); (Note my ignorance of this even after 1965-67 with EGL in VN! Secrecy I wouldn't have believed possible; along with assassination efforts, again secret (and EGL).

JCS assumed tac nuc warheads might be available for Lunas and “adopted contingency plans to respond to what they saw as the unlikely possibility [WRONG] that the Soviets would use such nuclear arms.” 172. They knew weapons had no locks on them. They did not know there were 98 nuclear warheads [!!! Jesus Christ! One could ask: What were they thinking? If that was not a mantra with respect to both sides, and Israelis, Pakistanis, etc.] They didn't know that local commander had authority to use them, “in the early stages of the deployment,” nor that this authority had been rescinded during the crisis.

US saw Berlin and Cuba as two sides of the same coin; expected strong SU reaction in Berlin to attack on Cuba. [An OVER-rated deterrent; in this respect, K did take account of strategic imbalance, as I supposed; more than US did: see Nitze odds, and JFK on odds of SU “going all the way to nuclear war” [I.E. BERLIN! THAT's what he meant! That was wrong. Did it result from JFK misreading K's motives, and determination (which related to Cuba more than to strategic confrontations? Why, since he knew of Mongoose? Why did he underestimate K's willingness to settle for a no-invasion pledge? Perhaps because he was so impressed by the apparent recklessness of K's deceiving him and embarrassing him before the election

[My hyp: What K meant was, “I won’t disclose them before the election,” exactly like Israeli assurance (to JFK! “We won’t be the first to introduce nuclear weapons into the Middle East,” meaning, “We won’t announce them or test them openly”! EXACTLY like K in Cuba! Was that about the same time?! And Israelis still deny or are ambiguous about the presence of nuclears in Israel! (See how close they came to using them in 1973, and even in 1967!) Like K on “defensive weapons”: “policy of ambiguity.” “We won’t tell if you don’t”: “we won’t embarrass you, or challenge you to respond”! Like Ike on U-2. (SU didn’t announce its first nuclear test; it let us do it!) NVN was secretive about, and denied, presence of NVA in VN (lied to Lynd).

Did JFK think: K **wanted** not (only) to defend Cuba, but to humiliate me and make an attack **in defense of Berlin** look reckless; he wouldn’t have hurt our relationship like this unless for bigger stakes. JFK was **certain** K would move on Turkey or Berlin if he attacked; he was wrong, LeMay was more right.

Smith: “For their part, Soviet officials have stated that they viewed Cuba and Berlin as separate and distinct issues with no close link between them.” (Still, what were K’s intentions toward Berlin in fall 1962? And were his mentions of Berlin privately before crisis meant to create a link between Cuba and Berlin in JFK’s mind—as they did—or not?

Smith says no intention of “top” officials to invade. But how was that affected by the Soviet buildup, and the resulting Republican issue? Did it increase JFK’s inclination to consider invading? Or diminish it (prior to discovery of missiles)?

From SU point of view, decision was made on the night of October 24/25 (Moscow time? Same day that blockade went into effect) to remove the missiles; and that no one ever intended to go to war over the missiles. Hence, “no danger of war, or of nuclear war” in actuality. BUT there was, in subsequent days! It was not certain that K would stop bargaining and offer or accept a no-invasion pledge as the sole basis of resolution **in time** to forestall a Cuban shootdown of a recon plane—**the FIRST one of which, along with the U-2 shootdown, could have and “should have”, on the basis of JFK prior commitment! Led to widespread US attacks and invasion.** When did the US know of these, precisely, and when did Moscow know? If JFK had not backed down from his earlier commitment to the JCS (reflecting his own **earlier** determination not to go to war, not to lose control of negotiations-rather-than-war) the crisis would have blown up on Saturday, and the world some days later. (What could K have done to prevent attack on MRBMs once the US attacked all the SAMS and AA? What could he have done to prevent invasion following?)

And consider what invasion would have meant, just in Cuba! (Garthoff, according to Gribkov: 18,500 US casualties in first 18 days; but that’s surely without even considering the presence of 40,000 SU troops, let alone 98 tac nuc warheads! And guerrilla war: JCS were hardly in a position to estimate the course of that accurately in 1962! Or 1961!) Granted, US/JFK overestimated certainty of this spreading to Berlin; but they totally

underestimated (maybe not so much, JFK) costs of war and possibility of nuclear war in Cuba itself! JCS on this: horse's asses. (Like Acheson).

(One count for Acheson, and JCS/LeMay: a surprise attack on Oct. 16-17 would have forestalled installation of warheads and even of missiles; and would not have led to attack on Berlin or Turkey. WHEN did warheads arrive, again? So they weren't so far off about the advantages of an attack IF it came right away, after discovery, as ExComm favored on first thought. But then, it would have been hard to demonstrate the very deployment under attack to the world, UNLESS they promptly invaded! And day by day, it got more dangerous than the JCS or ExComm foresaw.) Moreover, even by October 16, **the 40,000 Soviet troops were already ashore!**

Friday, October 7, 2011

In some respects, aggressive initiatives were safer for each party than he knew.

(1) JFK was deterred from attacking by the prospect that if he attacked, Khrushchev was likely, indeed “certain,” to respond with an attack on Turkey (or Italy!) or Berlin. Actually, Khrushchev didn’t find either of these worth considering. (In this respect, LeMay and other Chiefs were right; the balance was such that this was very unlikely.)

If JFK had known this, or agreed with the Chiefs...?

[Blair and Brenner: 265, n. 155. “Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov (*Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War*, pp. 260-61), provide an example of how Khrushchev resisted pressure to expand Soviet objectives during the crisis when the Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister proposed using Berlin as a lever to end the confrontation. They quote the Soviet leader as responding: “We are here trying to get ourselves out of this *avantyura* [reckless gamble] {did K really call his own project a reckless gamble? That was what he was accused of when he was deposed} and now you are pulling us into another one.”]

However, that was Khrushchev’s perspective prior to any US attack, i.e. before any Soviet troops had actually been killed (or missiles destroyed). How he would have responded to his own military, or to his own impulses, after experiencing such losses...would be harder to predict. JFK could have been right. (Khrushchev could have woken up on October 22 to the news that an attack had taken place, or an invasion was underway; likewise, on October 28. Then what?)

Interesting that JFK was so sure that the SU would react this way. Maybe he was projecting into them a knowledge of his own reluctance to initiate FU in Europe if they did attack in Turkey or Berlin; thus, he was wrongly foreseeing a willingness on their part to exploit their local conventional superiority in that area despite NATO threats of FU.

(Burchinal complained that JFK just didn’t take in and exploit the superiority that “the JCS had given him.” Of course, JFK didn’t find the consequences of the nuclear war they offered him as attractive as they did! Though they were right that Khrushchev was likely to back down from this threat, **just as JFK would** (and as even they would had they been in the position of the SU).

(2) Khrushchev did believe, most of the time, from October 22 on (and earlier) that JFK was reluctant to invade. (Or, wait a minute: wasn’t the whole premise of the deployment that he was not? Or at least, that military and political forces in the US were forcing him in that direction? As K feared during the crisis.)

But he probably underrated this. JFK (and McNamara) was determined to avoid an attack or invasion. If Khrushchev had known this... the whole operation was safer for Khrushchev than it might have been: if someone other than JFK had been in charge. (Nixon!)

However, it really was true that military pressures combined with events uncontrolled by Khrushchev (Cubans) or by JFK (SAC: U-2, Titan launch) could have overruled his reluctance.

3) I've long believed that Khrushchev was counting on JFK's maintaining silence about the MRBMs until after the election, even if he discovered them earlier. And I've believed this was not **entirely**, wildly, unrealistic. K himself had kept silent about the U-2 flights until he was able to shoot them down. And **JFK had kept silent about the actual, precise reality of the “missile gap” after September, 1961** (4 missiles! I didn't put this in the Gilpatric speech! Still, this worked in the opposite direction, from the **“MRBM gap,” or the “missiles near one's shores non-gap, equality”**.

Unless JFK was absolutely determined not to invade or attack—which he may have been (as McNamara claims, always!), though the October preparations don't support that, and in any case, Khrushchev could hardly be absolutely confident of that (if he had been, the “defending Cuba” rationale would have been pure hoax, to Cuba and the world, as the ExComm tended to assume, in ignorance of Mongoose)—then JFK would be virtually **compelled**, at the least, to take strong action (blockade at the least: which K was concerned to avoid: and it was going to remain a dangerous and effective option up until, as it worked out, October 23, before the election (though not so much, ironically, by October 24 when it actually went into effect; it prevented the IRBMs from arriving, but not the MRBMs, tac nucs, or warheads, or troops). Moreover, despite PSALM, it couldn't be prevented long from leaking (giving military incentives to leak). And if JFK was even somewhat, ambivalently, attracted to invading, this would give the perfect excuse for it, **precisely to win the election, before the election, not after!** (The attack, after all, would be popular—if JFK were ignorant of the 40,000 SU troops! **Why weren't they revealed, even before October 16? Clearly “defensive”!**! Ideally, they could have been sent, and revealed, even before September 4, when JFK made his fatal public commitment!

What could the Soviets have done to forestall that commitment? (After all, JFK made it only to explain why he wasn't opposing the “defensive” buildup, not, he thought, to deter. Sorensen claimed he would not have threatened against less than a hundred missiles if he thought they were going to send a hundred! So...Bolshakov tells RFK privately that **they are going to defend Cuba with Soviet troops—40,000—and with tactical nuclear missiles! Or, they send these secretly—along with MRBMs, which they leave on ships in port, or hidden in port, not deployed on land, until the island has been secured from invasion—thus frustrating a US blockade. Then they announce their presence: before, or even after the September 4 JFK statement.**

That leaves an air attack the **only** option for the US when the MRBMs and IRBMs are finally unveiled. But to counter that threat, the Soviets could publicly challenge the right of the US to decide whether a Soviet “base” on the island is acceptable or not, pointing to US bases abroad. **The Soviet MRBMs and IRBMs, after all, were not there to counter Turkish missiles; they were there to counter US ICBMs (as a substitute for, or precursor to, Soviet ICBMs). They were just as “defensive”—or more properly,**

**“deterrent” –as any US weapons!** Their major purpose would be to deter a conventional attack on their ally: just like SAC and US tac nucs in Europe and Turkey! And they could have publicized their alliance with Cuba, just as Castro wanted!

Once the MRBMs were in Cuba, the only vulnerable period would be while they were actually being installed and made operational. A US air attack would have had to take out the SAMS and AA, as well, a large attack: which would not be sure to get them all (if there was some uncertainty whether some had been installed already, or remained hidden).

Question: Was JFK **really** tempted to attack on October 16, as so many others were? Might that have persisted for a day or two, long enough to get it underway? It almost surely **would** have destroyed the missiles (“most of them”!) and would have remained limited to Cuba. However, the Soviet troops would have meant a BIG battle, followed by an endless guerrilla struggle (including Soviet troops!) So the JCS/ExComm ignorance of those meant that the Soviets had neglected a **major** deterrent!

Contrary to these potentials for “safe” attack, note that the situation involved precedents of “crazy” premises:

--K’s belief that the missiles could be hidden “by palm trees” from overhead surveillance (and the failure of local troops to camouflage, until late). (Someone in CIA, explaining their failure to predict the deployment, said “the error was Khrushchev’s”).

[see Blight and Brenner, p. 168, n.14. “Soviet military experts [sic] had calculated that the missiles could be camouflaged by the ‘dense palm tree forests’ in Cuba. In fact, palm trees do not grow in dense forests, and Cuban palm trees bear little resemblance to Soviet missiles.”

--Castro’s willingness to “go down in flames, with total annihilation” (of the world, not only the Cubans) rather than submit to occupation.

--Perhaps, K’s belief that if JFK discovered the missiles, he would conceal it before the election. (He might have wanted to—if he didn’t want to attack (see Nitze and Rusk initial reaction, which is what Khrushchev expected, exactly!)—but he couldn’t conceal, and couldn’t refrain from response, especially after September 4: did K reconsider tactics or project after Sept. 4? **Or was his response “irrational”?** (CHECK)

--the Strangelove perplex: failure to declare any of the deterrent capabilities actually installed, including failures of control; and the actual deployment of tac nuc warheads and readiness to use them, even delegation of control (before Oct. 22) (or for that matter, MRBM warheads, outside SU!) (as crazy as our doing the same, say for Germans or Turks).

--(Not crazy, but wrong: uncertainty about presence of warheads; assumption of K total control of Cubans and his own officers/warheads; over-estimate of each other's readiness to escalate; ExComm ignorance of SU motivations (K "aggressiveness"), Mongoose; beliefs that Fomin spoke for K, or that JFK was about to announce attack on Oct. 28, 9AM

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10-1-11

Ex-Com as a Big Con, a Big Store

: a consensus-building device (e.g. to bring along the republicans, Dillon and McCone, to the blockade); real decisions made by JFK within much smaller groups

Ignorance of ExComm of Mongoose, and of invasion plans; and of PSALM clearance; and of prior consideration of possible missiles.

(McCone knew of Mongoose—hence (?) his expectation of missiles, unlike (?) his intell estimators; but did even he know of invasion plans?

ExComm, in its ignorance, couldn't assess or even conceive of the importance of preventing US invasion as a SU aim, let alone, a or the principal aim. It looked like at least an effort to redress the strategic imbalance; but then, why was it done so covertly? And so urgently? Unless to make immediate use of it, say in Berlin. (Was this a motive at all? Has that ever come out—K intentions wrt Berlin, which he did say secretly he was about to reopen?

F Those in the know about invasion plans, on the other hand, knew that the ExComm as a whole couldn't discuss this and that their corporate advice was worthless, even worse than useless (based on assumption that the SU was being more aggressive than it was.

Wouldn't an air attack inevitably have opened up the question of SU motives and revealed the prior invasion plans? Or not? Would JFK have really minded that coming out (or even Mongoose), since it would answer Republican claims that he was being too passive?

Gribkov: K wasn't thinking about Turkish missiles, as a major consideration (until RFK and Lippmann raised them?! And until he was looking for some face-saving cover for retreating!

It was the tactical weapons—first revealed by Gribkov in Havana in 1992 (30 years later!) that were really addressed to, indeed critical to, defense of Cuba. Yet they weren't “used” as deterrent threats at all, even in the height of the crisis! Did any of the Sovs, starting with K, ever notice or comment on the implications of the FAILURE to disclose them? (Even the MRBMs weren't explicitly admitted until October 28: WHY NOT? Has that ever been explained? )

That meant, like the Doomsday Machine in Strangelove, the “worst of all worlds”: a defense/deterrent that wasn't used to deter and would not have deterred, a “defense” that would lead to destruction of Cuba if not of the world (in other words, it should have been a pure bluff even if it was threatened as a deterrent: as TCS believed K would have recognized and acted upon by not sending warheads at all, **just as neither side should**

**ever have implemented or permitted LOW—or thousands of warheads, scheduled for ground burst—even if they threatened that they existed! Or NATO FU!!! Or weapons without PALs, on ground or in subs.**

There is the moral question of making threats of actions that would be immoral to carry out. (Forbidden by Catholic ethics, but widely accepted as morally justified, and instrumentally justified, especially as “necessity.”) And the prudential question of threatening actions that would be insane, counterproductive, vastly destructive, to carry out (not only non-optimal, but suicidal, devastating to both and to neutrals. And in both cases, the risks of making preparations that make these threats more credible, but also more likely to be carried out even against the wishes of the leaders at the time.

SU decision to seek a Fait Accompli (FA) contributed to the political capability, and even political pressure, on US president to respond forcefully: surprise, shock, furtiveness suggesting “guilty conscience,” (doing something wrong, something legitimately to be blocked by violence), dangerousness. ALSO the necessary lying to the president; rage, potential for humiliaton for being fooled and disregarded (especially, warnings: which actually came “too late”—which JFK could have been told by K, at some point); encouraging JFK to make a public warning, which greatly increased his commitment, his vulnerability to humiliation, loss of majority in Congress within a month (! After assurance by K he wouldn’t do this, an assurance in line with their earlier intimate relationship),

Thus: Why was it a “crisis” at all? All above reasons, especially JFK’s prior warning, encouraged precisely by K’s assurances and secrecy (and followed by more deception, further increasing likelihood of a forceful reaction: **though in truth JFK WAS inclined to forego force and accept, if not the presence of the missiles, at least a humiliating trade, altering the “appearance of balance of power—i.e. (JFK) the reality of power - toward parity” (as Gilpatrick had denied a year earlier): just as K had expected.**

K’s expectation would have been fully justified if he HAD been able to achieve real surprise, and a FA revealed after the election. But how could he really have believed that US intelligence wouldn’t discover it? Especially with the absence of attempts to camouflage (he WAS successful in covering up transportation, more than US intell would have supposed, especially wrt Elint)! That struck me in my study; led to the hypothesis (Beschloss suggests: from Mikoyan, from me? ) that he thought JFK would cooperate in concealing it, as K had done wrt U-2 until the shootdown! NOT UNREALISTIC! See PSALM!

But even with PSALM, it couldn’t have been kept for weeks IF THE JCS AND CIA KNEW THAT JFK WASN’T IN THE PROCESS OF ATTEMPTING TO DESTROY THE MISSILES (JFK kept them hoping for that for a full week, but he couldn’t have held them off longer than that without at least a blockade, i.e. without revealing the presence before the election. Note that the NYT did HAVE the info (i.e. someone leaked! WHO? Never revealed! Presumably military?!) by October 21, before the

speech; he could only hold them off from printing for a day. (Note JFK questions: “How long before this leaks?”)

Why not postpone the whole deployment until after the election? Jesus Christ, JFK might well have invaded **before** the election, by October 20! Given the buildup before that; and even without it. So K needed the SAMS—but they were above all to keep off U-2s: they were in too late, relative to the deployment! IF they had been operational before construction on the sites (seen Oct. 14)—maybe the FA would have succeeded! He needed to have started the SAM deployment earlier; or delayed the construction of the sites (after delivering the missiles and warheads). After all, they were operational (the MRBMs, not the IRBMs) well before the election November 6; by October 26? They could have been delayed starting by a week. When were SAMS all operational, especially near the sites?

It does point to my hypothesis: that K was HOPING that the missiles wouldn’t be seen (unrealistic, “hare-brained”) (Note that “we” didn’t think he would be so reckless as to put them there at all—see NIE in February—but we certainly didn’t imagine “hare-brained” belief that the palm trees of Cuba would protect them from overhead recon!) but that he was COUNTING ON (or further hoping) that JFK

I.e., as I figured in my study, that it was timed to be discoverable, at worst, during a several-week period when JFK would be reluctant to attack, after which they would be invulnerable. He wanted the period of visibility-while-vulnerable (no warheads, not operational) to occur just before the election (see Rostow memo; example of 1960; and see British calculations before election of 1956, again getting it just backwards: Ike was MORE enraged at attempted FA just before election, potentially embarrassing him. K feared doing it AFTER election—might be too late (NOTE: I DIDN’T HAVE ANY CLUE OF THIS IN 1962, OR EVEN IN 1964! NOR DID MOST OF EXCOMM), and anyway, he thought JFK would then act during that vulnerable period (or blockade).

But the pressure on JFK (like Ike) was even greater before the election than after! (Imagine that DRV had deliberately attacked in Tonkin Gulf in August 1964 in the belief that LBJ would be too preoccupied to respond, or would want to keep it secret (which he could have, as well—or as ill—as JFK in 1962) (see silence on Israeli attack on Liberty in 1967, or on Iraqi use of gas at Halabja) during campaign: when reality would have been the opposite, McNamara (at least, if not LBJ) wanted to attack even when not sure there had been a DRV attack! (like Bush vs. Iraq)

(Compare Saddam’s deliberate ambiguity about his cooperation with the inspectors: apparently not to give up all deterrence against the Iranians! (Though what good did delay do, since he was going to give the inspectors access eventually?) And his confidence that Bush wouldn’t invade, apparently because he saw himself a potential ally of the US!) (But above all, HIS “doomsday machine” in 1990-91! Ask Ritter.)